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We claim:

1.   A method for providing data analysis tools in a distributed environment, comprising the steps of:

        (i)   receiving a service request from a client, the service request including input data;

        (ii)   creating a job including the input data and a job identifier;

        (iii)   dispatching the job to an agent for delivery to a service provider hosting a requested analysis tool for processing the input data;

        (iv)   receiving a result from the service provider, the result including output data representing the input data processed in accordance with the requested analysis tool; and

        (v)   transmitting the output data to the client.

2.   A method according to claim 1, wherein the steps of receiving and transmitting are accomplished over the Internet.

3.   A method according to claim 1, wherein the step of dispatching the job includes formatting the input data into packets for transmission.

4.   A method according to claim 3, wherein the step of formatting includes marking up the input data with extensible markup language (XML).

5.   A method according to claim 1, wherein the step of creating the job includes storing job information in a database.

6.   A method according to claim 1, wherein the step of dispatching includes balancing loads between application servers.

7.   A method according to claim 3, wherein the step of receiving the result includes integrating received packets containing the results to recover the output data.

8.   A system for providing data analysis tools in a distributed environment, comprising

a web server for receiving a service request, including input data, from a client;

a manager for creating a job including the input data and a job identifier;

a dispatcher for dispatching the job to an agent for delivery to a service provider hosting a requested analysis tool for processing the input data; and

an integrator for receiving a result from the service provider, the result including output data representing the input data processed in accordance with the requested analysis tool.

9.   A system according to claim 8, further including at least one web server for connecting to the client over the Internet.

10.   A system according to claim 8, wherein the manager includes a database for storing the job information.

11.   A system according to claim 8, wherein the dispatcher includes load balancing means for balancing loads between service providers.

12.   A system according to claim 8, wherein the manager includes markup means.

13.   A system according to claim 12, wherein the markup means includes extensible mark up language (XML).

14.   A system according to claim 13, wherein the integrator includes means to reassemble the job to retrieve the output data.